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VIDALON

OLD
MANUFACTURE
ROYALE

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This monument on the property of the Vidalon Mills marks the spot from which the first balloon ascended on December 14, 1782

Dedicated to the memory of
PIERRE DE MONTGOLFIER

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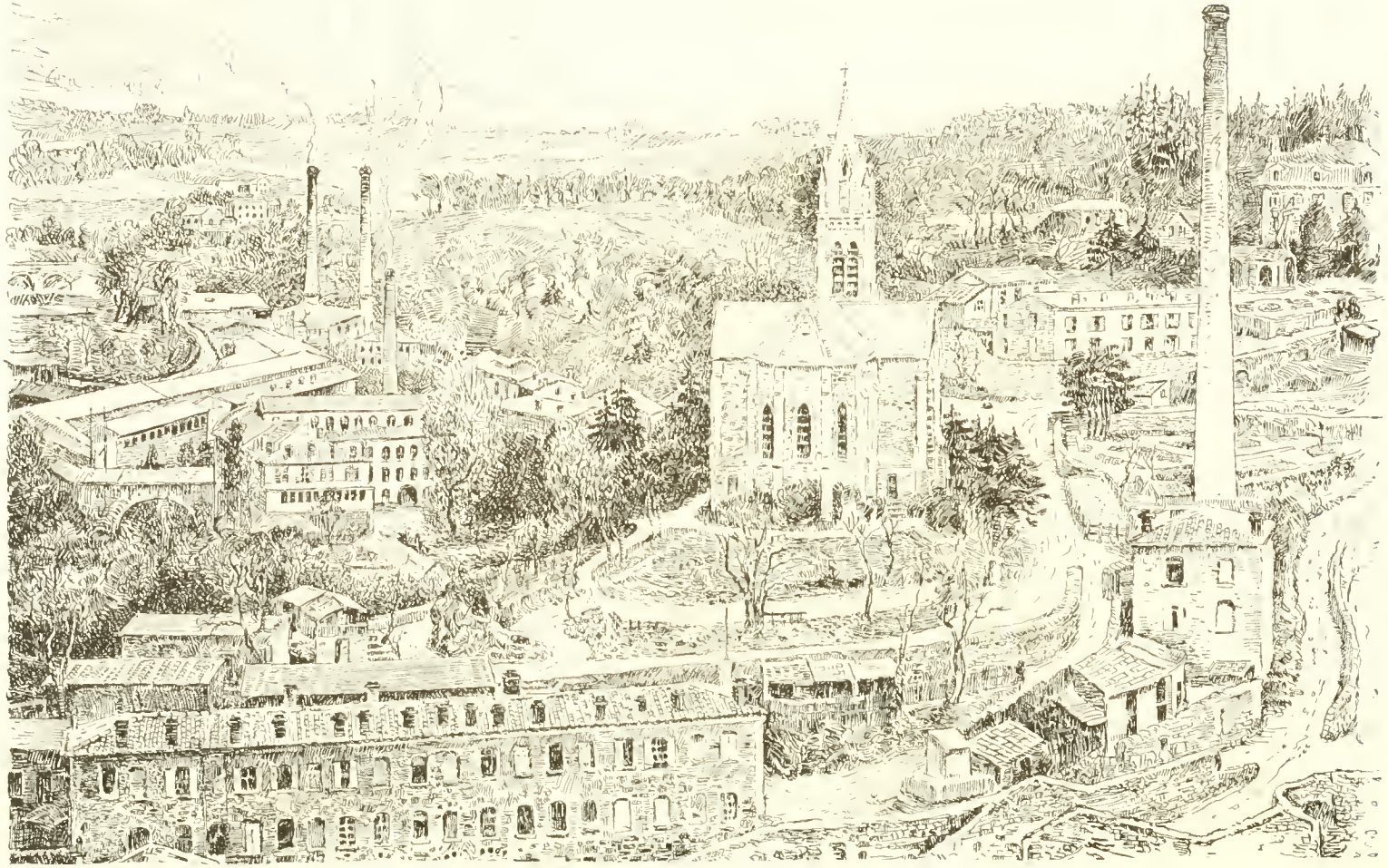
New York

This story is published with the intention of portraying to those interested in the use of paper a brief historical and romantic sketch of the Old Manufacture Royale of Vidalon, Ardeche, France.

For centuries Vidalon Mills have been operated under the direction of the de Montgolfier family, generation succeeding generation.



General view of Vidalon

VIDALON

IN THE 16TH CENTURY

THE Vidalon Paper Mills were already well known in the sixteenth century. At that time they were in the hands of the wealthy family De Boulieu, of Annonay. In 1670, the Vidalon Paper Mills were sold by Louis De Boulieu, Seigneur de Charlieu, to Barthelemy Crottier, Squire Des Marets, who was, at that time, Official Counsel to the Parliament.

Barthelemy Crottier married Mademoiselle Olympe De Calbert Des Fonds. At his death his widow became sole heir and she placed the mills under the management of Antoine Chelles, who was then sales representative of the Vidalon Mills. On March 12, 1689, Antoine Chelles bought from the widow of Barthelemy Crottier and for his own account the mills which he and his family had managed for many years for the preceding owners.

Antoine Chelles had two daughters, who, on January 14, 1693, married the brothers Raymond and Michel Montgolfier, sons of Jean Montgolfier, one of a family originating from Ambert, Puy-de-Dome, the very cradle of the French paper industry. Eventually Raymond Montgolfier became the owner of the Vidalon Mills. There he lived, made many important improvements in the mills, and died leaving a family of nineteen children. Upon his death the property was inherited by his son, Pierre.

Pierre Montgolfier

Pierre Montgolfier, born at Tence, (Haute-Loire), February 22, 1700, died at Vidalon, June 2, 1793, the father of sixteen children. He is the ancestor of nearly all the branches of the Montgolfier family in existence today. Pierre Montgolfier was a man of superior intelligence and high moral character. With the able assistance of his sons the mills soon made rapid progress. It was this Pierre Montgolfier who built the first machine for grinding rags. He began to study the mechanism of this machine in Switzerland in 1750, which was almost a quarter of a century before Desmarets, then Chief Inspector and Director of the French Manufactures, came to Vidalon to make the first installation of the then new Dutch cylinders with the cooperation of Etienne Montgolfier, son of Pierre, and with the subsidies of the Vivarais States.

Pierre Montgolfier has left some remarkable memoirs. Notably among these is a report on the condition of the Annonay Mills in 1769; he wrote a treatise on the defects of paper with special regard to sizing and to the paper pulp, the customs duties, and the regulations regarding the mills and their workmen.

General offices and residence of managing directors

Selecting and cutting rags at Vidalon-Le-Haut

"Letters Patent" given to Pierre Montgolfier by the King, Louis XVI, show, "That having received from his parents a paper mill located at Annonay, in the Vivarais, he has rendered it by his cares one of the largest in the Kingdom. . . . and that he made in his factory the first tests on wove papers." It is said, moreover, that in ennobling the father—Pierre Montgolfier—the King, by this act, intended to reward at the same time Pierre Montgolfier's two sons, Joseph and Etienne for the success attained at Vidalon, December 14, 1782, in an experiment of their invention, the hot air balloon, known now as the "Montgolfière." Demonstrations of this balloon, the forerunner of all aerostatic machines, were later given, first at Annonay, June 5, 1783, before the notables of the Vivarais States, and again the 19th of the following September, at Versailles, in the presence of the King, Queen and Court.

"Manufacture Royale"

At last, on March 19, 1784, the Vidalon Mills received the title of "Manufacture Royale," and also the prize founded by the Ordinance of December 28, 1777, awarded to "those who have opened new roads for the national industry or who have contributed to its improvement."

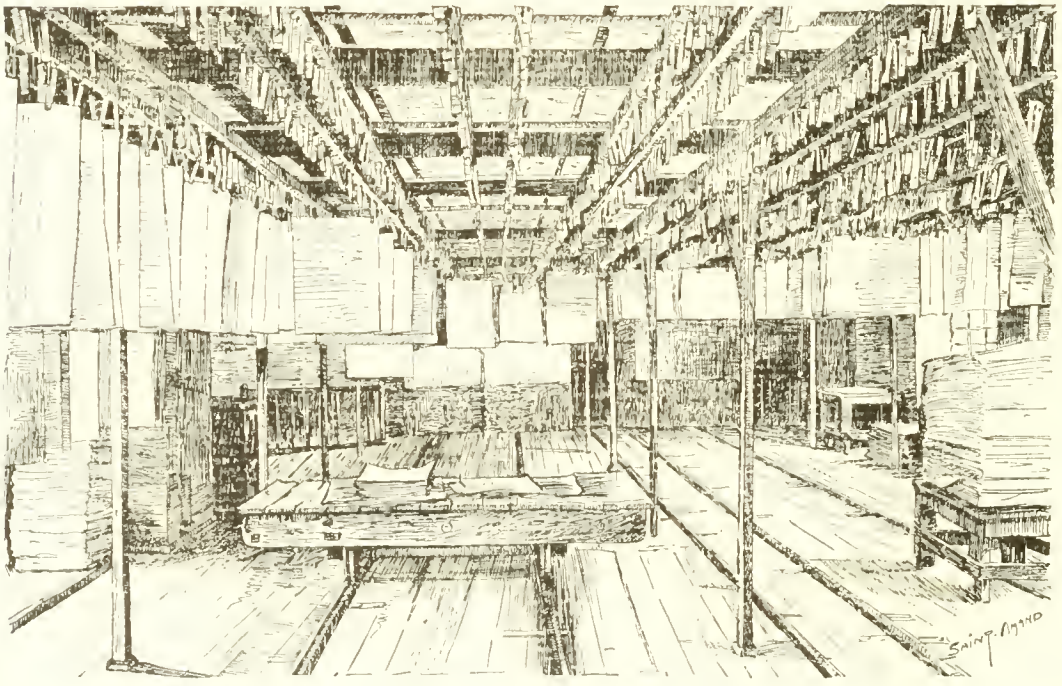
Pierre de Montgolfier finished his long and fruitful career at the age of 93 years. While still living he gave the Vidalon Mills to his son, Etienne, as the one of his children whom he considered the most capable to succeed him.

Etienne and Joseph Montgolfier, Inventors

As mentioned before, Etienne and his brother Joseph are recorded in history as the inventors of the aerostat. In addition, Joseph, whose inventive spirit was constantly active, is famed for numerous other inventions, principally the Hydraulic Pulsator, the Hydraulic Press, the Stereotype as a means of perpetuating printing plates, the Bleu d'Outremer, also known later under the name of Bleu Guimet, and the lamp with the cylindric glass, called "Quinquet" after the name of the man who commercialized the invention. The science and talents of Joseph soon caused him to be chosen Administrator of the Conservatoire des Arts and Metiers, then member of the Consulting Bureau des Arts et Manufactures, and later a member of the Institut de France. He was made Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by Napoleon I.

Etienne de Montgolfier, of more practical spirit than Joseph, had cooperated with the latter in several of his inventions but he devoted most of his time and energy to the Vidalon Mills. He made many great improvements, the principal ones being enumerated in his memoirs.

Hand paper making at Vidalon-Le-Haut



Drying hand made paper

In these memoirs there may be found interesting details on the manufacture and sizing of papers and also a plan and description of a machine he invented to maintain a constant and evenly stirred supply of pulp in the vats.

Barthélemy de Canson

Upon the death of Etienne Montgolfier, the son-in-law, Barthélemy, Baron de Canson, who was his business associate since the 5th Vendémiaire an V, became the proprietor of the Vidalon Mills. It was this de Canson who made possible the great strides of the paper industry by discovering a process of sizing by means of rosin and by producing colored papers. Later he installed one of the first machines to continuously manufacture paper. He was made Pair de France in 1830 and a Chevalier de la Légion D'Honneur in 1831.

Etienne de Canson, who succeeded his father, Barthélemy, invented the suction pump which controls the thickness of the paper and permits the speed of the paper machines to be greatly increased. He invented an injector for the boilers of steam engines and he also invented the turbine engine which bore his name.

Etienne was a man of incredible activity and was interested in everything that affected his community. He was the one who, with the assistance of his friend, Etienne Frachon, the mayor of Annonay, promoted the erection of the Dam du Ternay, a large reservoir of 110,000,000 cubic feet, which furnishes the water to the town of Annonay. He also erected, on land purchased by his father, the Mill of Pupil, where colored papers are made to this day. The dimensions of this building prove to what point he had visualized the extensive future of the industry he was managing. He was made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1849.

Marc Séguin

At the death of Etienne de Canson, in 1860, the Vidalon Mills became the property of Marc Séguin aîné, civil engineer, a corresponding member of the Institut de France and a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. Marc Séguin was the grandson of Pierre de Montgolfier. Besides his well known inventions, suspension bridges and tubular boilers, he was the builder of the first railroad in France and the author of numerous memoirs much appreciated by the many French and foreign intellectuals with whom he associated.

Marc Séguin, with his son-in-law and young grandsons-in-law, organized a society under the name of the Manufactures de Vidalon. The general management of this society he gave to his son-in-law, Laurent de Montgolfier, 1817–1884, who, for 23 years proved himself worthy of his ancestors.

Entrance to the Pupil mill at Vidalon

Power house and shop of Pupil

Laurent de Montgolfier

Under a most affable exterior, Laurent de Montgolfier, who still lives in memory, possessed a great intelligence and a rare energy. He knew that by increasing the number of his steam engines and other means of production he would give an extraordinary uplift to the Mills of Vidalon. He soon doubled both the production and the extraordinary appreciation with which the products of the Vidalon Mills are received. He was made Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1869 and Chevalier de l'order Imperial et Royal de Francois Joseph, in 1873.

Incorporated 1880

In 1880 the members of the Société Canson & Montgolfier decided to take the form of a corporation and since then the Manufacture de Vidalon have been under the control of a Board of Administration. This change of control did not modify the original policy of the organization. The centuries old traditions of this firm are always in the foreground to guide the progress of the Vidalon Mills, both in regard to the products made and to the creation of institutions for the betterment of the conditions of the workmen.

THE VIDALON MILLS

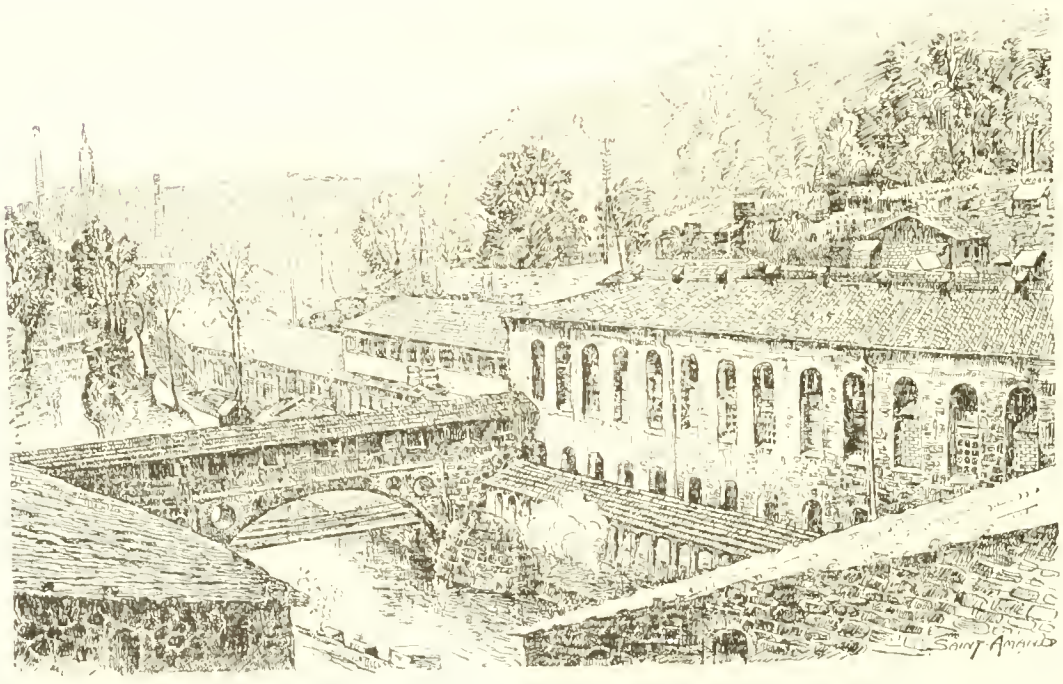
Location

Les Anciennes Manufactures Canson & Montgolfier include three factories: Pupil, Vidalon-le-Haut, and Vidalon-le-Bas, all located in the townships of Annonay and Davézieux. The three factories are situated, one adjoining the other, for the distance of over a mile on the banks of the River la Dêume, which is the property of the Society. The buildings cover a surface of 10 acres and are surrounded by an industrial estate of 75 acres of land.

Production Material

The Vidalon Mills are equipped for the manufacture of pure rag papers. Each of the factories is a unit in itself, including large shops for the reception, selection and cutting of rags, the working of pulp and the making of paper. The manufacturing is effected by 5 machines; 3 flat machines, 2 cylindrical and 2 vats. The paper thus made is transported to a vast room where the miscellaneous operations of sizing, calendering, cutting, selection, packing, etc., are carried out. In additional rooms are shops for ruling, making envelopes and boxes for writing

The bridge of Pupil



Rag stock room of Pupil

papers and the manufacture of drawing books and pads, which last are, perhaps, the most keenly appreciated specialty of the house.

All this represents a very powerful organization with the most modern facilities.

Water power is secured from three large dams, the smallest one being over 24 feet high and the largest about 33 feet. These are used as the source of power for a great many machines. In addition steam and electricity are used. The hydraulic motors, eleven in number, represent 420 H.P. Nine steam engines make a force of 280 H.P., the steam for these being generated in ten boilers. The electrical current is received by transformers and is used by 40 motors, representing 750 H.P. The total power equipment of these mills is about 1450 H.P.

The Water Supply

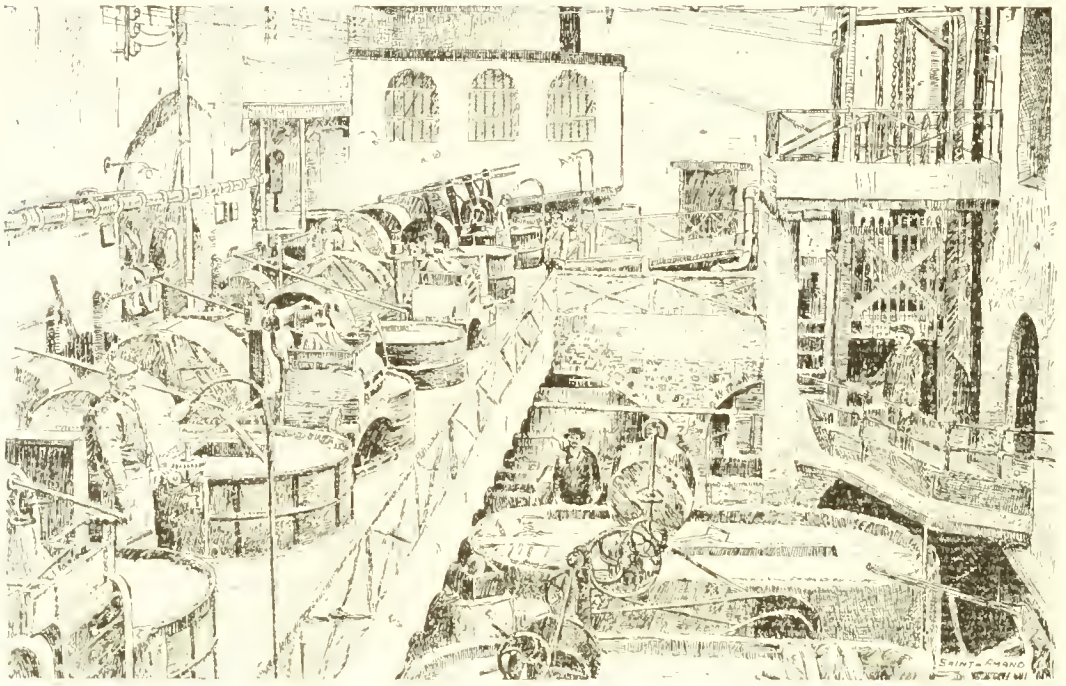
The source of the water supply which is actually used in the manufacture of paper is of unusual purity. The chemical analysis shows that it is particularly adapted for the manufacture of the high grade papers made at the Vidalon Mills. Frequent laboratory tests have indicated that the character of the water is an important factor in maintaining the quality of Vidalon Papers as it blends with the special sizing formula used in the papers manufactured in these mills.

It is an interesting fact that this water never varies in its unusual purity, coming as it does from nature's bosom in the valley of the Dêume.

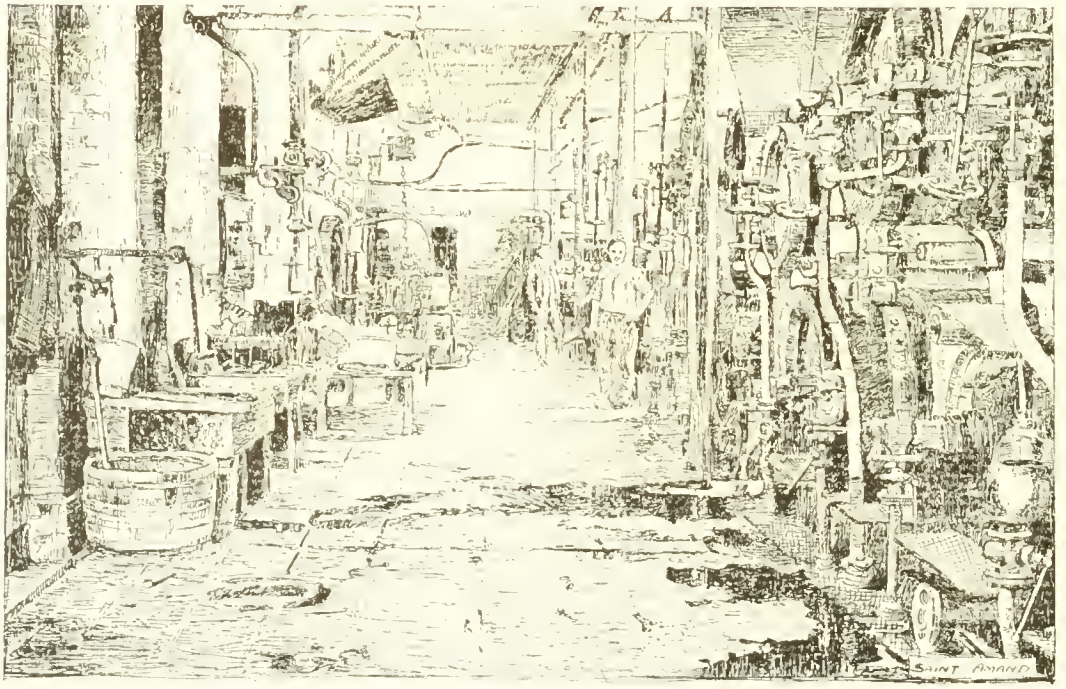
Manufactured Products

Because of the ample power available and the pure water supply, the production of the Vidalon Mills is very large, especially when the many different kinds of paper produced are taken into consideration. The papers best known are the *drawing papers*, which, under their century old trade mark, "Canson" are used the world over. Whatever may be desired—papers for artistic or industrial drawings, for pen, crayon, charcoal, pastel and water color—all can be had from the stocks of the Anciennes Manufactures Canson & Montgolfier. Of more than ordinary interest, also, are the miscellaneous drawing articles such as loose leaf sketch books, blocs, mounted boards, and drawing books of different sizes, etc., all of which greatly facilitate the work of the artist.

Besides the drawing papers, the other important products of Vidalon are: Ledger papers, writing and typewriting papers, blotting papers, certificate papers, *hand made* papers for announcements and editions de luxe, filtering mass and filtering papers, linen mounted papers, gummed papers for packing, etc.



Battery of beaters at Pupil



A paper machine at the Pupil mill

Official "papier Timbre" of the French State Department

At Vidalon-le-haut is also manufactured the "papier Timbre" (document paper) for the French State Department. The quality of this paper is known to all who use it.

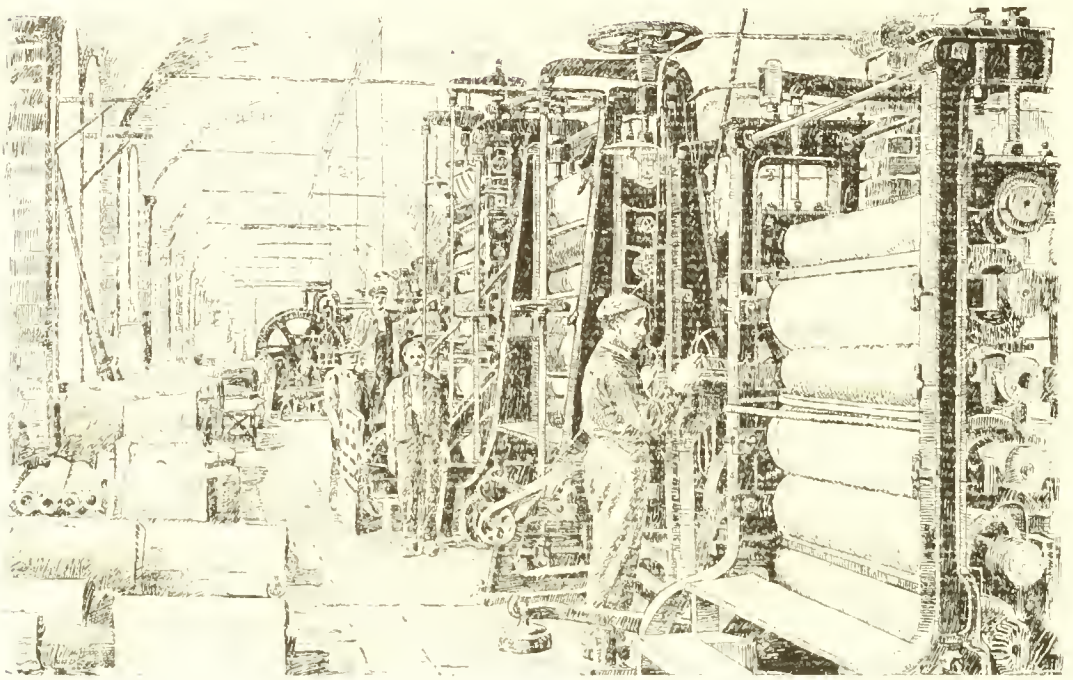
Throughout the World—Vidalon

For the distribution of these many products a strong commercial organization is needed. This organization has its general offices at Vidalon, with a general manager at the head. For many years a selling branch, carrying a large stock, has been located in Paris, 39 rue de Palestro. Its manager represents the company in all public administrations of business there.

Two other branches, one at 461 Eighth Avenue, New York City, and 46 route de Frontenex, Geneve, Suisse, are well established. Besides, the firm has representatives in Belgium, Spain, Greece, Holland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Indo-China, Brazil, Chili, Cuba, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Syria, Palestine, etc.

It is almost needless to say that the list of awards obtained by the Manufactures of Vidalon is a particularly long one. Here are the most important:

Title of Manufacture Royale, April 15, 1784.
Grand Prix, founded by the Ordinance of December 28, 1777.
Legion d'Honneur, 1831, 1849, 1868.
Medailles d'or en L'an IX, 1806, 1819, 1834, 1839, 1844, 1849.
Hors Concours, 1855.
Prize Medal, London, 1862.
Diplome d'Honneur, Paris 1872.
Grands Diplomes d'Honneur, Vienna, 1873 and Amsterdam, 1883.
Prize Medal, Philadelphia, 1876.
Medaille d'Or, Exposition Collective, Paris 1878.
Grand Prix, Classe X, et Medaille d'Or, Classe XIV
Institutions Patronales, Paris, 1889.
Diplome d'Honneur, Exposition Universelle de Photographie, Paris, 1892.
Hors Concours, Chicago (U. S.), 1893.
Grand Prix, Classe IX, and Medaille d'or Classe VI, Exposition Universelle, Lyon, 1894.
Grand Prix, Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900, 10 recompenses de collaboration.
Grand Prix, Exposition Franco-Morrocaine de Casabalanca, 1915.



Paper calendering department

The central warehouses

Personnel

The Société Anonyme des Anciennes Manufactures Canson & Montgolfier, which owns the Vidalon Mills, obtained, in 1921, for its personnel, 73 medailles d'honneur, of which 10 are medailles de Vermeil and 63 medailles d'Argent.

The medaille d'honneur du travail is given by the Ministère du Commerce et d'Industrie in reward for continuity of service in the same establishment; d'Argent for 30 years and de Vermeil for 50 years.

When it is considered that these factories have a total of less than 400 workmen, the proportion of the medals appears so large that one has a strong desire to know more of an industrial establishment whose prosperity is so closely allied to the faithfulness of its workmen.

Workers Institutions and Community Welfare

Since the very beginning, the owners of Vidalon Mills have understood that besides the great question of commercial and industrial policy there is a great social question. This last has always been uppermost in their minds. The results obtained from the careful study of this problem are worthy of attention.

Apartments

The working population of Vidalon, which amounts to more than 800 inhabitants, live in buildings belonging to the Society. These are situated close to the factories. Each family, in proportion to its size, may rent, at very small cost, 2, 3, or 4 rooms, with cellar and attic. A number of small, two family workingmen's houses are now completed. These are built after a special plan to secure the maximum light, air and cleanliness, and they are the first of a model group which the Society proposes to build as soon as circumstances permit. These new houses will replace the old style apartments which are not as convenient as they might be.

Gardens

Each family is alloted a portion of ground near the factories, 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft., in which to cultivate vegetables. To aid in securing good crops the Society distributes seeds and fertilizers without cost to the workmen. Under present conditions, which allow the men much more leisure than formerly, these gardens offer a good way to enjoy the hours of recreation.

Religious Service

Those of the personnel who belong to the Catholic Church attend a large and elegant chapel which is built in the center of the factory

Inspection and selection of sheets

grounds. This chapel is served by a priest chosen by the diocese authorities. The few members of the personnel who are Protestants attend churches at Annonay.

Schools

To offer every convenience to the parents in sending their children to school, there is, at Vidalon itself:

1st. A Private Kindergarten for children of either sex below seven years of age. At present it has an attendance of 30 children.

2nd. A private school for girls, with two classes, which prepares for high school. There are fifty little girls attending this school at present.

Both kindergarten and the school for girls are conducted by Sisters and private teachers.

Boys of school age go to the Annonay or the Davézieux schools.

Family Allotments

The head of each family working at Vidalon receives, for each of his children, whatever their number, an allotment corresponding to 5% of his salary. This applies to all children less than 13 years of age and to all unmarried children of any age who live at home with the family and work in the factory. The peculiar conditions which surround the paper industry and which enable it to employ the old men, women and children, have fostered the adoption of this system to insure an unchanging personnel of large and stable families.

It may be interesting to note that family allotments have existed in the Anciennes Manufactures Canson & Montgolfier since October 1, 1916, which is a short while before the movement, which originated from Grenoble (Isere) under the happy and energetic umpulse of Mr. Romanet, attained the results that are known to all interested in the social question of the workman.

At the birth of each child the father of the family receives:

50 francs for the first.
75 francs for the second.
100 francs for the third and following.

Care of Sick

Nursing Sisters are always on duty at Vidalon. These Sisters render first aid before the arrival of the doctor and see to it at all times that the patients receive the constant care and treatment necessary. A well stocked pharmacy supplies free drugs and medicines to those who need them.

Help Fund

A help fund, originating from miscellaneous gifts and legacies has been established to aid the more needy families with gifts of clothing and other necessities.

Cooperative Society

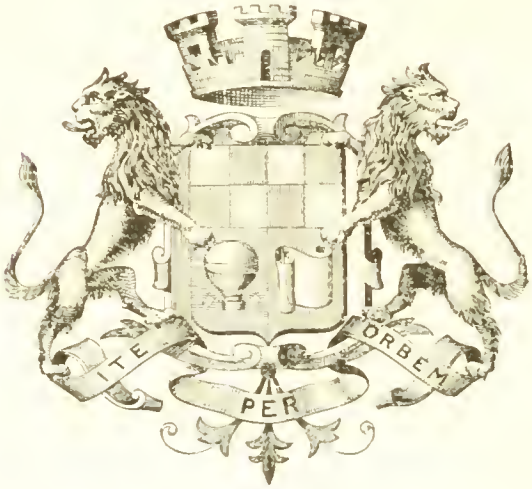
A cooperative society among workers was instituted about two years ago. The majority of workmen are stockholders. This cooperative society supplies its members with eatables and clothing.

Canteen

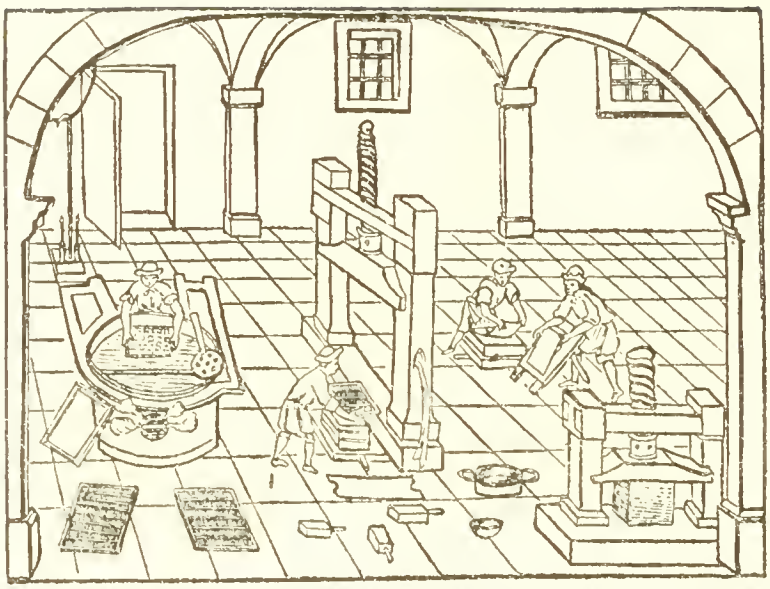
A canteen is installed in the center of the factories. Meals are prepared in a common kitchen and served at extremely moderate price in two well lighted dining rooms. One dining room is reserved for women and the other for men.

Fire Company

Because of the isolated location of the factories there has been a fire company at Vidalon for more than 60 years. It is composed of an officer and 40 petty officers and men, all ex-soldiers or men of the building trades—masons, carpenters, etc. Three pumps located in different parts of the factories furnish the necessary water supply. The Vidalon fire company has rendered signal services in the past, as much in neighboring towns as in the factory itself.



The chapel of Vidalon



Ouvrier faisant du papier a la cuve à Vidalon au XVI^e siècle

Sketch made at the Vidalon Mills in the Sixteenth Century shows the early methods of paper manufacture

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